



Four reasons trainers should be more like fence posts

Will Paull

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“Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men”- John F. Kennedy

Be honest. Would you say that you are as intelligent as a fencepost? To be a good horse trainer that's how intelligent you need to be. If you go to many old, traditional, ranches, you will often find a fencepost in the middle of their round corral. The Duke of Newcastle recommended a school with two fenceposts, the “pillars”. It's been known for centuries that a fencepost is an excellent horse trainer. Having spent many years observing the behavior of fenceposts I have identified four key things that fenceposts are very good at which make them good at training horses, and we should try to emulate.

First. A fencepost is very consistent. There is the fencepost, exactly the same today as he was yesterday, same as he will be tomorrow. He is not going to try something for a few minutes, then change his mind, or give up, or doubt himself. He doesn't buy a new bit every month, trying to spend his way out of a problem he can solve with a little more practice. A horse soon learns that he can count on a fencepost to behave the same way in any given situation.

Have you ever seen a horse very gingerly scratching his delicate eyelid on a fencepost? This is the second thing we can learn from a fencepost. As long as the horse is gentle and respectful, the fencepost will be gentle and respectful too. When he needs to be, that crusty, scaly, fifty year old, log can be as light as a feather on a horses eyelid.

Now suppose the horse comes galloping into the corral, playing with his friends, not watching where he is going, and disrespectfully steps into the fencepost's personal space. Here comes the boom! When a horse is disrespectful a fencepost will run into him very hard. One of many misconceptions about so called “gentle” methods of training horses is that it's all hugs and kisses. There is a time and place to really clobber a horse. You might think you're hitting a horse hard, but you aren't hitting him nearly as hard as a fencepost or another horse does. They will sometimes even break bones, and they don't feel one bit bad about it after. This is the third thing fenceposts are good at. They hit as hard as they need to.

What if a horse invades your space bubble uninvited? You let him know he shouldn't do that, but as he is retreating he happens to step on your foot. Do you get angry and keep hitting him for it? Better not. The fourth thing that fenceposts are very good at is, they never lose their temper. The horse doesn't know he stepped on your foot, heck he can't even comprehend that you are capable of feeling pain or fear. All the horse knows is that when he tried to back out of your space like he's supposed to, you got mad and attacked him for it. Fenceposts never get angry, yell, growl, attack, seek revenge, or hold a grudge. Ever.

A horse will, in any situation, unfailingly do what he thinks gives him the greatest likelihood of finding safety and comfort. If your horse does what you want, it's because you have done a good job of teaching him that he can find comfort by doing what you want. If he doesn't do what you want, it's because you have done a good job of teaching him that he can find comfort by not doing what you want.



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“...they imagine that a piece of iron in the mouth of a horse can make him knowing. As well they might fondly believe, that a book in the hand of a boy would teach him to read the first time before he has learned his letters” -William Cavendish, Earl, Marquis, and Duke of Newcastle, 1658

Thanks for reading, Will